

Military Market

MAGAZINE FOR THE MILITARY RETAIL SYSTEM

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THE OLD GUARD: Walter Nelson and V.A. Young, former VCS officials.

"I left with a feeling of confidence and good spirit. Now, I'm afraid that good feeling is gone."

THE VCS DILEMMA

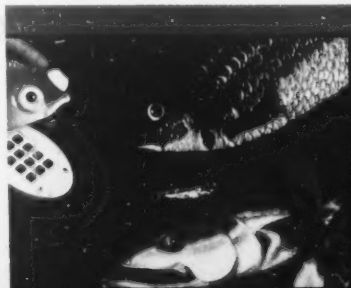
Congress Listens to Both Sides of the Debate



THE VA SIDE: Robert E. Lindsey, Thomas E. Harvey and Mansell G. Piper.

"I regret we have not been more forthcoming with the subcommittee to let you know what we've been doing."

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MARKET REPORT:
Giftware '86
Maintains Status Quo

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COVER PHOTOGRAPHS BY TRACY WOODWARD AND KATE PATTERSON
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Military Market

serving the military
resale system

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VA medical directors survey: VCS does the job

Most Veterans Administration medical center directors feel the Veterans Canteen Service does a good job, according to the results of a 1985 survey, obtained by MILITARY MARKET.

"It is clear from the responses," said the survey report, "that most Medical Center Directors rate their canteens very highly on all items."

The survey asked the 170 VA medical center directors to rate VCS in several areas of service.

The results, however, were only briefly discussed at last year's hearing and were never released by VA or VCS officials.

"To prepare adequately for this [1985] hearing, we need your guidance and advice on several areas of concern," the survey told the medical center directors.

The survey was distributed via telegraphic message on Sept. 12, 1985, six days before the hearing held by the subcommittee on oversight and investigations of the House Committee on Veterans Affairs. The hearing was the first conducted since VCS was established.

The results of that survey were neither discussed at last year's hearing, nor discussed at *this year's* event.

However, a copy of the survey tabulations was sent to the subcommittee soon after the Sept. 24, 1986, hearing, said a VA official.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: See page 22 in this issue for more information on the 1986 hearing.]

The survey was directed by Marjorie R. Quandt, then the assistant chief medical director in the office of administration of the Department of Medicine and Surgery.

The reason the survey was not presented at the 1985 hearing was because "no one asked about it," said a VA official who asked not to be identified. "You don't go to a hearing and volunteer information."

The survey was not released from DM&S for a year because "we didn't think it was very conclusive or particularly important," the VA official said. VCS management only recently got the chance to review the study.

Some VCS employees say the reason the study was not released earlier was because of its favorable slant toward the Canteen Service.

"That survey wasn't released because it didn't show anything was wrong," a VCS headquarters official said.

The official told MILITARY MARKET that the survey's outcome did not appear to support the proposed reorganization plan of the Canteen Service. It was therefore scrapped immediately.

Of the 170 directors of VA medical centers, 148 responded to the survey.

The directors were given four days to telegraphically transmit their responses to headquarters.

Responses were rated on a five point scale from excellent to very poor. The average response to all questions was in the superior to good range.

For example, 44 percent of the medical center directors rated canteen employees as having an excellent attitude, 35 percent said their attitude was superior, 18 percent said it was good. Less than 1 percent said it was poor, and none said very poor.

When asked if the retail products sold were responsive to patients' needs, 40 percent said superior, 33 percent said excellent and 24 percent said good. Less than 1 percent said poor or very poor.

About 19 percent said the quality of the food service was excellent, 36 percent said it was superior, 38 percent said it was good and less than 1 percent said it was poor. None said very poor.

Other questions show similar response patterns.

[EDITOR'S NOTE: See chart below.]

The last question was open-ended and asked the medical center directors what changes they would make if given the opportunity to make such decisions.

The responses to the open-ended question were grouped by frequency:

- ☐ Give medical center more control of canteens — 35 responses;
- ☐ No changes needed — 20 responses;
- ☐ Improve food operations and management — 19 responses;
- ☐ Improve the variety in retail store — 9 responses;
- ☐ Improve pay of food service workers — 8 responses.

Other issues cited less frequently were expanding canteen hours, giving canteens more space and better equipment, eliminating the sale of tobacco products and retaining the VCS' field offices.

Not all respondents answered every question.

Results of the 1985 VA Medical Center Directors Survey on the VCS

Item	Excellent	Superior	Good	Poor	Very Poor
Quality of food service	29	53	56	10	—
Hours of food service	38	37	54	14	—
Food variety	24	54	57	9	—
Responsiveness to customer	35	51	43	3	—
Food employees attitudes	42	54	39	7	2
Retail employees attitudes	62	50	26	4	—
Retail store hours	29	45	65	5	2
Appropriateness of goods	36	56	50	2	—
Mix of retail goods	37	60	44	2	—
Product responsive to employee needs	36	55	49	3	—
Product responsive to patient needs	47	58	35	2	2

Military Market index

COMMISSARIES

		JULY			YEAR TO DATE		
		CY'86	CY'85	% CHANGE	CY'86	CY'85	% CHANGE
AIR FORCE	CONUS	\$160,222	\$171,001	-6.30	\$1,085,979	\$1,082,522	0.32
	OVERSEAS	31,997	5,112	525.92	208,430	179,473	16.13
	TOTAL	192,219	176,113	9.15	1,294,409	1,261,995	2.57
ARMY	CONUS	112,665	104,685	7.62	760,305	743,925	2.20
	OVERSEAS	35,175	30,870	13.95	246,435	217,245	13.44
	TOTAL	147,840	135,555	9.06	1,006,740	961,170	4.74
NAVY	CONUS	53,994	54,621	-1.15	435,689	437,044	-0.31
	OVERSEAS	6,336	5,960	6.31	50,149	48,669	3.04
	TOTAL	60,330	60,581	-0.41	485,838	485,713	0.03
MARINE CORPS	CONUS	13,821	13,539	2.08	98,175	98,102	0.07
	OVERSEAS	273	270	1.11	1,861	1,760	5.74
	TOTAL	14,094	13,809	2.06	100,036	99,862	0.17
COAST GUARD	CONUS	254	259	-1.93	1,824	1,827	-0.16
	OVERSEAS	215	248	-13.31	2,000	2,043	-2.10
	TOTAL	469	507	-7.50	3,824	3,870	-1.19
ALL COMMISSARIES	CONUS	\$340,956	\$344,105	-0.92	\$2,381,972	\$2,363,420	0.78
	OVERSEAS	\$73,996	\$42,460	74.27	\$508,875	\$449,190	13.29
	TOTAL	\$414,952	\$386,565	7.34	\$2,890,847	\$2,812,610	2.78
GROCERY STORES	U.S. ¹	\$24,209	\$22,832	6.03	\$159,603	\$151,978	5.02

EXCHANGES

		JULY			YEAR TO DATE		
		CY'86	CY'85	% CHANGE	CY'86	CY'85	% CHANGE
AAFES	CONUS	\$237,623	\$239,121	-0.63	\$1,653,409	\$1,626,940	1.63
	OVERSEAS	162,332	152,197	6.66	1,158,375	1,061,070	9.17
	TOTAL	399,955	391,318	2.21	2,811,784	2,688,010	4.60
NAVY	CONUS ²	84,548	83,022	1.84	587,383	596,444	-1.52
	OVERSEAS ²	38,542	33,687	14.41	259,287	250,792	3.39
	TOTAL ²	123,090	116,709	5.47	846,670	847,236	-0.07
MARINE CORPS	CONUS	28,694	28,694	0.00	192,168	197,222	-2.56
	OVERSEAS	5,231	5,231	0.00	34,260	34,066	0.57
	TOTAL	33,925	33,925	0.00	226,428	231,288	-2.10
COAST GUARD	CONUS ³	6,722	6,561	2.45	46,728	45,621	2.43
	OVERSEAS ³	501	510	-1.76	3,480	3,548	-1.92
	TOTAL ³	7,223	7,071	2.15	50,208	49,169	2.11
MAIL ORDER	CONUS ⁴	1,061	876	21.12	9,013	7,931	13.64
	OVERSEAS ⁴	2,374	3,294	-27.93	22,434	21,828	2.78
	TOTAL ⁴	3,435	4,170	-17.63	31,447	29,759	5.67
ALL EXCHANGES	CONUS	\$358,648	\$358,274	0.10	\$2,488,701	\$2,474,158	0.59
	OVERSEAS	\$208,980	\$194,919	7.21	\$1,477,836	\$1,371,304	7.77
	TOTAL	\$567,628	\$553,193	2.61	\$3,966,537	\$3,845,462	3.15
DEPARTMENT STORES	U.S. ¹	\$10,458	\$9,717	7.63	\$70,830	\$67,125	5.52

1) SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce. 2) Does not include sales of ship stores. 3) MM estimate, based on official data. 4) Includes consolidated sales for all services, including Coast Guard.
 NOTE: Individual figures may not add to totals because of rounding. All sales are expressed in millions (add 000), except grocery stores and department stores, which are in billions. Commissary sales include appropriate surcharges; exchange sales include concession volume.